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ABSTRACT

This report presents the rationale, scope, and implementation of an innovative early childhood education leadership training program in Israel designed to improve child care services in development towns and among the disadvantaged. The program aim is to focus attention on the importance of replacing the prevailing custodial care with integrated services and programs which address both educational and social concerns. University graduates from a variety of educational and experiential backgrounds were selected for an additional year of university level classwork and supervised field work in the basic areas of child development, parents and family life, the training of paraprofessionals, and community resources. The goal of the program's curriculum is to train a person who is sensitive to individual and group needs (to children, parents, staff and other community agents); who knows how to assess these needs and to make, implement and evaluate plans to meet them; and who can develop professionally in the process. Most graduates of the program are involved in establishing a variety of innovative and experimental child care programs. The university program is described in terms of curriculum and goals and the impact of the program is informally assessed. Implementation problems are indicated and briefly discussed. (Author/RH)

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Developing Leadership for Integrated Early Childhood Programs in Israel

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Introduction

During the last ten years, awareness of the importance and potential of early childhood programs has been growing among professionals of different disciplines who have recognized that infants and young children have developmental needs. Health and nutrition, mental health, welfare or educational programs have been designed throughout the world in an attempt to meet these needs.

The evaluation of these programs has raised questions as to their long term effectiveness. It has highlighted the complexity of the attempt to develop and implement adequately integrated programs, and has directed attention to the lack of sufficient knowledge regarding their potential contribution to issues of social gap and sultural differences. Despite the myriad of issues involved, one main factor has emerged as crucial to the success of programs (Hunt, 1975)[2]: The people who are responsible for them on a day-to-day basis.

Despite the importance of a program's personnel to its success, not enough attention is always paid to their preparation. The complexity of the demands on the workers in such integrated programs requires that special thought be given to their training.

When one considers the problem, several issues and dilemmas arise. Among them are: (a) What is the appropriate professional level of trainee? (b) In what institutional framework is training best provided? (c) To what extent is in-service or preparatory training integral to the training? (d) How are the goals and objectives of the training to be defined when the professional demands which will be made of the graduates are relatively vague? (e) What should be the length of the training, its content and teaching methods? The solutions to these issues and dilemmas must always be sought within the constraints determined by the state of a given field at the time.

While in many ways the field of early childhood programs in Israel, its history and needs, is different from its counterpart in Europe or the USA, many of the recent developments in it parallel those observed in other countries. There is a growing recognition in Israel that programs for very young children may provide a vehicle for dealing with issues of social gap, provided that these programs are integrated into services in the community, involve the entire family and are based on the best professional principles available today.

Such a view is a break away from the long Israeli tradition of providing day-care facilities for infants and young children. This tradition goes back to the late 1920's when day care centers were first opened. The main function of these day care centers was to release the mothers from the physical care of their children for 8-9 hours a day. The needed change from custodial care to a greater educational involvement is taking place slowly, and its implementation is heavily dependent on the availability of professionally trained manpower to carry out the innovative programs.

It is a well known fact that during the past 30 years Israel has had to absorb large waves of immigration from a myriad of different cultures, with a large proportion of the immigrants coming from underdeveloped backgrounds. Many of these immigrants were settled in groups in Israel's rural areas and so called "development towns". These towns were developed in uninhabitated areas of the country almost overnight and were settled by waves of immigration from all over the world but mostly from underdeveloped countries. Many of these towns suffer from a low educational level. Today the greatest need for integrated early childhood programs is in these areas, where community services are less developed and the manpower to run them less available. Since Israel has evolved a dominant Western, industrialized pattern of society, pro-

grams are needed that will be both meaningful and involving for parents of different communities, while at the same time answering the needs of their children who are required to learn how to function in a society and culture with different demands from those of their parents.

Although Israel has a long tradition of early child care and early education programs, it has never addressed itself adequately to the training of manpower working with the very young (0-4). In training its personnel for the preschool and nursery schools, issues of integrated services and programs, parent and community development or specific issues of social gap are rarely dealt with.

Generally the professional status of workers with the very young is very low. This is reflected in low pay, non-existent career development and poor social image. Many women who opt for this profession come themselves from underpriviledged backgrounds. They have no training. A high turn-over among these workers is quite typical.

In view of all this, a decision was taken to develop a training program that would provide <u>leadership</u> for the early childhood programs in the country. Training intervention could be initiated at various levels, many thoughts and deliberations addressed this question. Finally a clear policy decision was made to start training "from the top". The major reason for this decision was based on the recognition that a major attitude change has to be reached by the organizations and government offices as well as the general public, a change that will lead to the recognition of importance of an integrated social and educational approach to issues of early childhood programs, a change in attitude from the emphasis on "custodial care" to a provision of a service that will meet both educational and social challenges. Choosing university

graduates for a unique intensive and highly select training program both trains for high quality, potential leaders, manpower as well as delivers the message of the importance given to such a professional endeavor. A program was then evolved that would "train the trainers" of para-professionals at the grass-roots level.

The Israel Association of Community Centers and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) initiated an experimental training program with the financial support of UNICEF, JDC, and the Ministry of Education of Israel. The training program was then placed within the Hebrew University as a past-B.A. certificate awarding program and called "The Schwartz Graduate Program for Training Directors of Early Childhood Programs for Children and Their Parents in Community Centers".

The program was initiated during the academic years 1975-76. Two groups of graduates are already working in the field.

The Training Program

Philosophy

Underlying the training program is the basic belief, based on recent research, that the growth and development of children and their families is dependent on the total pattern of the environment in which they function. The home, the educational setting and the community at large with its resources and services must operate in an integrated fashion in order to promote the positive growth and development of young children.

The child is a person whose development and functioning are a result of the dynamic interaction of biological givens, physiological, cognitive and social-emotional factors. Any program, individual or group care, attempting to facilitate this develop-

ment must give serious attention to the individuality of the child and his unique potential for growth. This development takes place through interaction with responsive human beings, and with the physical environment as mediated through these human beings. The very first few years of his life are very important to the child's growth and development and ways of coping with his surroundings.

Most parents (unless very severely handicapped) are the most significant human beings in the young child's environment. Their contribution to the development of their children is unique and the more sensitive they are to the developmental needs of their children, the more helpful they are to their child's development. Parents' positive self-image is reinforced by experiencing themselves as competent partners in the educational effort revolving around their children. The more competent and motivated they become, the greater the likelihood of their involvement in the community in which they live and the greater the likelihood of their search for creative solutions to the problems of the social gap.

Goals and Objectives

The philosophy of a training program is reflected in its goals and objectives. Our goal is to train students as professionals in the field of integrated early childhood programs. It is expected that the program will attain its goal by helping the student develop:

A. In the area of child development:

1. Knowledge and understanding of developmental patterns in early childhood, their implications for individual and group care.
2. Knowledge and skills in using methods of assessing the emotional and developmental needs of children during the first years of life as well as their

competence.

3. The knowledge and skills to implement programs that promote growth and development. This includes familiarity with specific programming methods and materials and administrative requisites, as well as familiarity with methods to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.

B. In the area of parents and family life:

4. Knowledge and understanding of the role of parents and the dynamics of family life, in families of different social and cultural backgrounds.

5. Knowledge and skills in using methods to assess parents' needs and their attitudes to children, patterns of parent-child interaction and home environment.

6. The knowledge and skills to implement and evaluate programs to meet parents' needs and to their competence as educators of their children.

C. As it relates to training para-professionals:

7. Knowledge and understanding of principles of recruiting, supervising and training para-professionals.

8. The knowledge and skills to assess the needs of para-professionals working with children and parents. This requires an appreciation of the interdependency of the trainer, parents, para-professional and other professionals.

9. The knowledge and skills to use or implement and evaluate programs promoting the competence of para-professionals in their roles as educators of children and facilitators of parents in the roles of educators.

D. As it relates to community

10. The knowledge and skills for using the community center and available community services, organizations and facilities to meet needs of the program and to promote the understanding of its importance.

Last and foremost, the program is designed to help the student learn to use himself as a professional: That is to understand the role played by his own personality, conduct, attitude and belief system and to appreciate the importance of further professional growth.

The goal of the program's curriculum is therefore, to train a person who is sensitive to individual and group needs, to children, parents, staff and other relevant community agents, who knows how to assess these needs, make, implement and evaluate plans to meet these needs, and who is able to grow in the process. It is somewhat presumptious to assume that every graduate of the program will attain all these objectives within one academic year. It is expected that most of the graduates will require a few additional years of supervised field experience before they satisfactorily attain the program's objectives.

The Curriculum

A. Setting, Candidates and Structure

The curriculum is that aspect of a training program which bridges the gap between its philosophy and the attainment of its goals. A curriculum is more than an arrangement of courses. Besides the educational experience, it involves a variety of academic policies which determine the context in which the courses are offered to the students' total experience of the program and the teaching methods which are employed

to impart the content of the curriculum.

Setting: The training program is incorporated in a post-B.A. university program to train directors and senior personnel for Community Centers, called the Schwartz Program. This program is a joint project of the School of Social Work and the School of Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Decisions concerning it are taken by a joint committee of the two schools. This joint involvement reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the program. Courses taken in the program can be credited towards a Masters degree issued by either the School of Education or Social Work. Further recognition by other university departments is presently being sought out.

Candidates: The admission requirements to the program are a B.A. degree, preferably in Education, Psychology or Social Work and experience in working with children and/or parents. The Admissions Committee considers factors such as general involvement in social educational matters, motivation to work directly with the very young, with disadvantaged families, and in "development towns". The committee also considers the sensitivity of the candidate to the needs of others, including those of young children, the candidate's openness to new ideas and change, her ability to take responsibility and initiative and to be assertive.

During the first three years of the program, about 28% of all applicants were accepted. All applicants are women, some married with children. About 25% have their B.A. in Education, 25% in Psychology, 15% in Social Work and 35% come from various other disciplines. Their relevant experiences vary, and include among others the experience of a "caregiver" in a kibbutz, a soldier teacher to families in a "development town", a director of a home-start program, and a volunteer in a pediatric ward.

The training program will achieve its goals only when graduates are actually

working in the field. Since Israel's most severe needs lie in "development towns" and poor neighborhoods in large cities, graduates are encouraged to take positions in these areas. This is done by providing financial support during studies to students who legally commit themselves to working after graduation for one or two years in early childhood programs in poor neighborhoods or "development towns", and by placing students in either "development towns" or poor neighborhoods during their training.

Structure: The training program lasts one full academic year and as such encompasses three trimesters. The student is expected to spend an average of 14-16 hours a week in courses concentrated in three days and 18 hours a week in supervised field work which take up the other three days of the week. Most courses are given once a week in two-hour sessions. Courses and field work are supplemented by special workshops, study-trips and intensive seminars. Each student is required to participate in all the courses offered and fulfill all field work requirements. Attempts are presently being made to individualize some aspects of the training.

B. Content of the Curriculum

The curriculum is divided structurally into three major categories: Courses, Field work and Study-trips, seminars and workshops. All categories relate to 4 content areas: (1) the child; (2) the family; (3) the para-professional staff; and (4) the community. Administration and organizational issues are interwoven into each category in each of the content areas.

Courses

(1) The Child and programming for children: Courses offered include advanced discussions of theories and findings in the field of child development, the application of

theory in child development to the assessment of developmental needs and programming to facilitate the attainment of developmental goals. Fieldwork involving observation, reporting, the implementation and evaluation of specific programs is required within the framework of the courses. One course emphasizes case study analysis of behavioral deviations of specific children.

(2) The family and methods of working with parents: The courses on family focus on two major areas: one is that of family structure, dynamics and functioning looked at from a general point of view; the other is that of the family with special needs, especially the disadvantaged family. The cultural belief systems, values and attitudes regarding child rearing in families from different ethnic backgrounds are examined. Fieldwork assignments require observations in different homes, intensive work throughout the year with three families, participation in parent-groups and the planning and implementing of parent workshops.

(3) Staff development and training: Courses offered cover aspects of recruitment and selection, role definition and team structure, formal and informal in-service training, individual and group supervision. All these aspects are reflected in specific assignments in fieldwork.

(4) The Community: In the courses that cover this area community characteristics, organization and functioning are discussed and analyzed. The child welfare services and developments in Israeli community centers are looked at critically. Courses are supported by field work assignments which require that students study the early childhood needs in reference to services available in the community of their field placement. Students then formulate plans for programs that will meet these needs, while incorporat-

ing existing services and programs in the community and utilizing available resources.

(5) Administration: One course and a variety of fieldwork assignments increase students' administrative and organizational skills relevant to all content areas.

(6) Fieldwork: Each student is assigned to a parent-child program in a community or day care center. An attempt is made to expose students to a variety of communities (rural, development towns, poor neighborhoods in big cities) and to a variety of programs. There is a general "check list" of graduated field work experiences which serves as a guideline to student and supervisor. Students are exposed to (a) direct work with children, both individually and in groups, (b) direct work with parents in home visits, group discussions, workshops, (c) work in the community - with organizations and services and with parents as community agents, and (d) direct work with staff, providing in-service training to para-professionals and supervision to individual members of the staff. Throughout these assignments the student must acquire organizational and administrative skills as well.

Each student receives approximately three hours of supervision a week - half individual and half in a small tutorial group. It is the role of the supervisor to help the student integrate the various field experiences with the course material and to help the student become aware of her areas of strength as well as those in which she needs to acquire further skill and practice. The supervisors help the students adjust their field work experiences as they complement the skills and background acquired prior to participation in the program. The students' experiences in their field placements are supplemented by visits to and comparison with other students' field placements.

Last, but not least, it is mostly through supervision that the student learns how to use "herself" in her professional role.

Study-trip and other educational experiences

Special trips are taken throughout the year. Students go out individually, in small groups or as a class to visit experimental Home Day Care programs, special education programs and special programs in "development town" or kibbutzim, etc. Special workshops and simulation games are provided that increase students' self-awareness (group dynamics), familiarity with special educational activities (music, art, movement) and specific organizational and staff development skills. These are supplemented by special seminars and guest speakers on a variety of subjects such as (1) a community health project to promote child development; (2) different models of home-start intervention programs; (3) nutrition, food and eating; and (4) family planning and the role of women in Israeli society.

C. Teaching Staff

The teaching staff of the program reflects its interdisciplinary nature. Faculty and field work supervisors include psychologists, early childhood educators, social workers and community workers as well as a pediatrician and a nurse with a public health orientation. Many of them are senior people in their respective fields.

Regular meetings and seminars with the participation of field work supervisors and faculty members provide the setting for integrating the learning experiences provided by the various aspects of the program.

D. Evaluation

The program to date may be evaluated according to two major criteria:

a. To what extent have the educational experiences provided met the stated objectives of the program?

b. How great has the impact of the program been on the field of early childhood in Israel?

Evaluation of the educational experiences has been carried out on several levels. In the first year of the program: (a) Each teacher in the program was requested to delineate the goals of his courses and to evaluate their attainment at the end of the year. (b) Students evaluated their courses for the quality of teaching and relevance of course material to the goals of the program. (c) A meeting of all field work supervisors with directors of field placements was held to evaluate the "match" between the needs and requirements of the places of placement vis-a-vis theose of the training program. (e) The field work supervisors met to assess and evaluate methods of supervision and evaluation as well as criteria for selection of field placements.

In addition, evaluation sessions with the entire group of students and the director of the program were carried out in the middle and at the end of the academic year. In these sessions students were approached as "partners" in the efforts to improve this unique and experimental training program. The discussion focused on an (a) overall evaluation of courses - goals, overlap, relative weight given to various subjects, redundencies and shortage; (b) field work experiences, placements and methods of supervision; (c) field trips, visits, workshops and "special study" days with guest speakers; (d) methods of student evaluation and the general facilitation of the process of personal and professional development of the student. These group sessions were

supplemented by individual meetings of the program director with each student, for additional information. Following the mid-year evaluation certain changes were introduced in courses, field placements and workshops. More changes were introduced towards the following academic year. Monitoring of program effectiveness continues in a similar fashion during the third year of the program.

An additional recent source of evaluation has been derived from interviews with graduates and their supervisors in the field.

Evaluation of the graduates impact on the field is only beginning, following the graduation of the second group of students. The first very crude criterion of impact is the actual number of graduates actively involved in the field. Twenty-six (26) out of 34 graduates who completed their studies by July 1977 are now (June 1978) actively involved in the field of early childhood. Twenty-two (22) out of the 26 are involved in innovative and experimental projects revolving around new approaches and new methods of reaching out to the very young population of the country and their parents, thereby setting models for others. The richness and varieties of programs developed are rather impressive. A second criterion of the impact of the program is in the changes observed in the attitudes of agencies and organizations. Specifically, these have become more open to the innovative projects developed and directed by graduates of the program. At the same time, they have become more sensitive to the need for quality care for young children and more aware of the fact that this requires that manpower be appropriately trained for this work. A more refined criterion for evaluating the impact of the program is the actual effect the work of the graduates has on the development of children and their families. At this early stage only anecdotal evidence is available and we are still awaiting a more formal evaluation of this effect.

Agencies and government offices begin to develop new supervisory and training roles where graduates contribute to the improvement of quality of day care. Organizations involved in traditional day care are inviting graduates to develop model centers into which parent and community work are integrated. New out reach programs into families of young children have moved from the planning table into the field due to the availability of the new conceived professionals. We are still a long way away from the full public appreciation to the needs of young children, but the impact has begun showing its effect and the choice of "training for leadership" in this area had justified itself.

Issues, dilemmas and future perspective

In planning the training program described, it was decided to focus on training "leadership" in the field of early childhood rather than para-professionals. A University interdisciplinary setting was chosen as the setting. An intensive multifacetted one year training program which included simultaneous student involvements in courses and fieldwork was designed.

These decisions were made in the context of the special needs the program intended to meet. Yet, these decisions should be evaluated in view of what has since transpired.

The apparent impact of graduates on the field at large seems to justify the choice of "leadership" training. The university setting helped to provide a high level and critical framework, suitable for the required leadership training. Certain limitations however, resulted from this decision. For example, the program fails to attract candidates from distant development towns, since those who may qualify already hold key positions which they cannot or should not quit.

The attempt to meet all the program's objectives in one year of training creates new problems and dilemmas. The main "price" paid is that of relative superficiality in dealing with various subjects, and a tremendous pressure on students to cope with many and varied issues at the same time. The dilemmas resolve around setting priorities in training. Possible solutions point in the direction of "continued education" for graduates and more individualized tracks of study which will take better advantage of each student's unique background.

The attempt to create a new profession while at the same time developing a training program, requires utmost sensitivity and awareness of how the new is being incorporated into the existing. Feedback must be implemented immediately into the training program, a fact which forces the program to remain flexible and under continuous evaluation. Consolidation of courses, seminars and fieldwork assignments is slowed down by these other demands. This is very taxing and demanding on the teaching and supervisory staff. The enthusiasm of innovation, however, acts as a great support both for staff, students and graduates.

The program has cut a new professional image in the country, and has created a supportive system in the field. It is now required to keep this image from fading away.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

(1) Gratitude and appreciation is expressed to the late Prof. Arnulf Pins for his help, advice and encouragement in developing this program. The author wishes also to thank Dr. Avima Lombard and Dr. Zvi Feine of the Schools of Education and Social Work (respectively) at the Hebrew University, and for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

(2) Hunt, J. McV.: Reflections on a Decade of Early Education in Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1975.

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